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**Book title:** *Language Brokering in Immigrant Families: Theories and Contexts*

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**Chapter title:**

**Young adult language brokers' and teachers' views of the advantages and disadvantages of brokering in school**

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**Bios**

Sarah Crafter is a Senior Research Officer in the Thomas Coram Research Unit at University College London, Institute of Education. She has a Ph.D. in Cultural Psychology and Human Development and her theoretical and conceptual interests are grounded in sociocultural theory, transitions, critical or contested ideas of 'normative' development and cultural identity development. Her work with child language brokers grew out of broader interest in the constructions or representations of childhood in culturally diverse settings.

Tony Cline is a member of the Educational Psychology Group at University College London (UCL) and contributes to its Professional Doctorate for experienced Educational Psychologists. He initially worked in inner city and suburban areas around London as an educational psychologist. Subsequently he moved into higher education, where he has led professional training in Educational Psychology at UCL and headed the Department of Psychology at the University of Luton before returning to UCL to take up his present post in September 2004. His publications have covered a wide range of subjects, including child language brokering, the education of bilingual children, psychological assessment, dyslexia and selective mutism. He is co-author of the textbook *Special Educational Needs, Inclusion and Diversity*.

Evangelia Prokopiou, BA, MSc, PhD is a lecturer of psychology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Northampton, UK. Her research interests focus on the Psychology of Culture and Human Development and more specifically on the construction of identities in culturally diverse contexts, the impact of immigration on cultural identity development of children, adolescents and adults, identity development in community/supplementary schools, constructions of childhood (including unaccompanied asylum seekers and language brokers), the impact of cultural change on family, community and identity.

**Abstract**

Schools have been cited as one of the most frequent venues where children and young people act as language brokers (Angelelli, 2014; Tse, 1996). Whilst a number of studies have used school as the access point to gather data from child language brokers (CLBs), the ways in which school might offer particular contextual challenges has been given less attention. This chapter will report on a mixed-methods study involving teachers and young adults who had acted as CLBs while they were at school. We use data from an online survey of teachers (N=63) and young adult CLBs (N=25) and in-depth episodic interviews that look at teachers' (N=12) and young adult language brokers (N=14), to examine their stances towards the advantages and disadvantages of students acting as language brokers in the school context. Our findings suggest both groups shared many opinions on key advantages and disadvantages, with the exception that CLBs placed more emphasis on prioritising family interests and highlighted improvements to both languages. Some of their comments focused on the immediate advantages (such as cost savings and flexible timing) and disadvantages (such as a greater risk of translation errors). Other comments focused on the longer term impact of experiences of language brokering at school, such as a growing sense of maturity and confidence, and feelings of pride in being able to help others. Teachers and CLBs discussed the potential problems that may arise if too much time is taken away from studies or if the same pupil is overused for translating activities. CLB activities left many in the sample feeling 'gifted' and 'empowered' but for the CLBs it could also be a cause for embarrassment. Overall, how the school handles the brokering experience influenced both the teachers' and CLBs' views of it.

## **Introduction**

Schools have been cited as one of the most frequent venues where children and young people act as language brokers (Angelelli, 2014; Tse, 1996). Whilst a number of studies have used school as the access point to gather data from child language brokers (CLBs), the way in which school might offer particular contextual challenges has been given less attention, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK). In a past review of the literature on CLB in the UK context (Cline et al, 2010), we noted that there had been no known studies in the UK, or elsewhere, of the frequency of reliance on CLB activities in urban schools. In addition, there was an absence of studies of teachers' professional perspectives on language brokering and on the views of students who had undertaken language brokering while at school about their experiences in that setting. This chapter will report on a mixed-methods study involving teachers and young adults who had acted as CLBs while they were at

school. In particular, we use data from an online survey of teachers and young adult CLBs (Teachers, N=63; CLBs, N=25) and in-depth episodic interviews that look at teachers' (N=12) and young adult language brokers' (N=14) stances towards the advantages and disadvantages of students acting as language brokers in the school context. Respondents from both groups framed the advantages and disadvantages according to what they thought language brokering had offered in terms of efficiency and parental preferences. Both groups also talked about advantages and disadvantages for the future, in terms of the potential impact on young people's schooling and their social development.

### **The importance of the school context**

Research studies in the US have provided a substantial indication that school is a significant site of linguistic and cultural mediation. Evidence has shown that CLBs translate notes and letters from school for their parents more often than any other documents (Weisskirch, 2005), and the use of brokers in face-to-face meetings is not uncommon (see Orellana, Dorner & Pulido, 2003). However, reports of CLB activity at school in the UK have been either anecdotal (Kaur & Mills, 1993) or have focused only on the CLB perspective (Hall & Sham, 2007) or the process of translation (Hall, 2001). There has also been a study in the UK that has explored young people's perspectives on how language brokers negotiated missing school when faced with competing family obligations to undertake language brokering duties outside of school (Crafter et al. 2014). However, language brokering was just one aspect of that study, and school was not the main focus of interest in research that had a wider agenda. The study on which this chapter is based takes the field further by providing an evidence basis for more sensitive and effective practice and

articulated school policies on the use of children as language brokers in school for their own parents and others.

We had other reasons to focus on school as a particular context of interest. Efforts to find policy documentation or official guidance in the UK on the practice of using students to translate on behalf of their own families when the conversation with teachers is about their own or a sibling's school progress had limited success. We were not able to trace any explicit school policy statements or national policy statements by national standards bodies, and the topic is not included in initial teacher education. The lack of official policy guidelines for professionals on the use of child language brokers is not unique to either the school context or the UK context. There have been similar findings, for example, from a team working in Bologna, Italy (see Cirillo, Torresi & Valentini, 2010). There was, in the past, some official support in the UK for schemes [also known as programs in the U.S.] in which bilingual students were trained to act as interpreters for other students' parents at national level (QCA, 2008), and at the local level, for example, a scheme aimed more towards using young interpreters as peer support for newly arrived pupils (Hampshire Borough Council, Young Interpreter Scheme, 2014). Therefore, a wider intent for the study around which this chapter is written was to develop guidance for schools on the use of child language brokers (see <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/child-language-brokering-school> for more information).

We have argued elsewhere (Cline et al. 2014a) that the lack of official policy guidance reflects an ambivalent attitude to the practice of language brokering that permeates professional and academic commentary on the subject of second-language use and bilingualism more generally. Even within increasingly 'super-

diverse' locations within the UK (see Vertovec, 2005), monolingualism is still perceived as the prevailing practice, whilst multilingualism is only vaguely understood (Cline et al. 2011), and in some cases, explicitly viewed as negative (Brutt-Griffler & Varghese, 2004). In locations of high language diversity, the home languages of many immigrants are socially devalued and in some cases, actively suppressed in institutional settings like school (Cummins, 2000). The lack of policy guidelines may also reflect institutional endeavors to avoid using children at all costs (Cirillo, Torresi & Valentini, 2010).

In addition, professional perspectives on using children for language brokering suggest some well-founded reticence on their behalf, particularly in the case of challenging or sensitive situations. One fundamental disadvantage to using CLBs that is often cited is that like other non-professional interpreters, they are likely to make mistakes in their translations (Flores et al., 2003). Child language brokers are often asked to use the language of institutions, so it is not surprising that technical words or difficult situations lead to misunderstandings. It has also been argued that the responsibility placed on the broker may be stressful and excessive, and they may lose time at school (Morales & Hansen, 2005). Some commentators have advocated that children should never be used as language brokers in school settings (e.g. Linse, 2011). This view is endorsed by many other professionals who describe various types of discomfort at using children for interpreting and translating, especially when sensitive or confidential matters are to be discussed (e.g. Cirillo, Torresi & Valentini, 2010). Whilst such a perspective may be born of best intentions, the reality is that for economic, social, migratory and cultural reasons it is unlikely the practice will decrease. Nor does such a negative perspective take into account the

potential benefits to an individual of undertaking language brokering activities in school.

### **The advantages and disadvantages to child language brokering in school**

In a study of dual-language immersion classes, Coyoca and Lee (2009) found that pupils who acted as brokers to newly arrived pupils helped facilitate membership and inclusion into the classroom. In this instance, it seems likely that this was doubly enhanced by the dual-language use. However, the authors also noted that brokering in the classroom could limit children's learning and decrease autonomy and motivation. When looking specifically at a science classroom, Bayley et al. (2005) found that peer language brokering allowed pupils to follow along but was insufficient in terms of accessing the full curriculum. Further evidence demonstrates that there may be a link between language brokering and assessed performance in mathematics and literacy (Dorner, Orellana & Li-Grining, 2007).

The literature on child language brokering presents a mixed picture with respect to the impacts it may have on social and emotional development. There is evidence that the activity can cause stress (see Jones & Trickett, 2005) or child distress (Jones, Trickett & Birman, 2012). Research also points to some positive dimensions such as pride (e.g. Orellana, 2003) and to a perception in multilingual areas that such activity is just a normal thing to do when one is bilingual (Cline et al. 2011). More recent research has taken a more nuanced approach by looking at specific activities. For example, translations around formal documents and finances were reported to put more strain on parent-child relationships than other activities (Roche et al. 2014). In the current study, our particular focus was on the role of school and the school context and what this might mean for the child who is language brokering.

In this study of the school context, we aimed to explore whether the stressful features of brokering, such as difficulties with technical words, levels of responsibility and significance for the outcomes of the activity, were perceived to be as great for school as in other settings such as a doctor's surgery or a bank. In addition, we were interested in exploring further the notion that CLBs are "advocates", "tutors", "surrogates" (Valenzuela, 1999) or a "performance team" with their parents (Valdes, 2003). These roles had been evidenced in an interview study with professionals in Italy (see Cirillo, Torresi & Valentini, 2010) where, in two instances, child language brokers strongly advocated for their families. One situation involved a charity and the other a municipal support centre. School, however, offers wider scope for examining potential tensions between the interests of all those involved, the child, the teacher and the parent. Our study was designed specifically to fill a gap in the published research by examining teachers' perspectives directly. We also examined more closely how key stakeholders viewed the impact that engagement in CLB activities has on a young person's identity and social development.

## **Method**

We collected data from two groups, teachers and young adults who had brokered during their time at school. In this chapter, we refer to them as ex-CLBs to denote that they were discussing a practice in their not-too-distant past, though many continued to language broker beyond their time in school. The study involved two phases. The first phase made use of an on-line survey for both the teachers and ex-CLBs which explored the frequency of CLB use in schools and the purposes for which it is used.

### **Participants**



25 ex-CLBs participated in the online survey (Female = 21, Male = 4) ranging in age from 16 to 26 years. Participants were recruited from two universities in the East Midlands and two in London. We also advertised through a young interpreter network and wrote to the heads of 429 supplementary and complementary schools in London, the South East and the East Midlands. For the interviews, 14 ex-CLBs (4 of whom were male) participated. Four of these were recruited from the survey phase of the study. The remaining interviewees were recruited with the help of two teacher interviewees who introduced us to language brokers who were about to leave their schools. Their countries of origin included Austria, Hong Kong, Iceland, Lithuania, Nepal, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Turkey, Venezuela. Two of our participants were born in the UK. One had parents who came from Bangladesh and the other had a mother from Mexico and a father from Italy. However, translating for their parents in school was generally more common at the secondary stage (11-16 years). 60% of the young people reported that they had translated for their parents in primary school sometimes or often, a figure that rose to 88% for secondary school.

Our sample for the online survey included 63 teachers (Female = 51, Male = 12), and 34 fell into the 24-40 age bracket and 29 were aged between 41-60 years of age. All of them had at least one year's teaching experience with almost half the survey sample having taught for over ten years. Our sample held a variety of roles within schools. Some were class teachers and others were English as an Additional Language Teachers or coordinators. Given their professional roles, the sample shows a bias towards teachers with a specific interest in this topic. Similarly, over a third of those teachers who completed the survey had parents who had been born overseas and over a third had been born overseas themselves. For the interviews, there were 12 teachers (Female = 10, Male = 2) and 8 were in the age range 41-50

years. Using the UK Census categories, 10 reported their ethnic background as White British or White European, 1 as African Caribbean and 1 as Chinese. 8 worked in secondary schools and 2 in primary schools. In terms of their status and duties in school the sample comprised:

- 4 subject/class teachers
- 5 EAL coordinators and teachers
- 2 staff with Head of Department or Senior Management Team responsibilities
- 1 teaching assistant.

On the basis of their accounts of their fluency in different languages we judged that 3 members of the sample were bilingual or multilingual and 9 were monolingual in English.

## Measures

We used 5 items from Tse's (1996) Language Brokering Scale such as asking about age, gender, age at which respondents began translating for others, who respondents had brokered for and sibling information. However, we adapted some of these questions (see our website for a copy of the full survey:

<http://tinyurl.com/j3azydt>). For example, when we asked who the respondents had brokered for, we additionally asked how often this activity took place. In the Culture Broker Scale by Jones & Trickett (2005) participants were asked to indicate when parents relied on them to undertake particular activities such as answer the phone, door, or fill out applications. We applied a similar type of questioning to the school context asking our language brokers if they (or in the case of the teachers, their pupils) had translated for school activities such as formal meetings, new pupils or school letters. The teachers in the sample were asked the same questions as the ex-CLBs with adaptations to take account of their perspective. For example, "When I have felt comfortable asking pupils to translate at school it has been because, a.

Lots of their friends do it” became “When I felt comfortable translating at school it was because, a. Lots of my friends do it.”

Our survey contained additional questions reviewing their range of experiences translating in school and comparing those experiences with others through the use of short vignette questions. This chapter reports on two items from the language broker and teacher surveys which were a series of statements outlining the possible advantages and disadvantages of having children act as translators on behalf of their parents (e.g. “The child understands what their parents already know and what they need extra explanation about”) and possible disadvantages (e.g. “Young people may not know technical school words well enough, so that they make translation errors”). The questionnaires for teachers and ex-CLBs covered the same ground with some variation in individual items (see here: <http://tinyurl.com/j3azydt>). Participants indicated their agreement with each statement using a scale of 1-6 with 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree and option 6 = ‘I don’t know’.

We followed the online questionnaire with interviews that used the episodic approach (see Flick, 2000), with a small number of selected respondents, in order to explore issues related to the experience of language brokering in schools in greater depth. As with the survey questionnaire, the interview schedule contained many parallel topics that were applicable to both teachers and ex-CLBs. During the interview, respondents were asked to recount a situation of language brokering either with a parent or peer, to describe how this was arranged, the reactions of the people involved, the impact on relationships, and issues related to language skills and emotional responses to the situation (see <http://tinyurl.com/j3azydt> for a copy of the interview schedules). Both groups were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of language brokering in school and were invited to suggest

recommendations that they thought would help to improve practice in schools. In addition, some questions were developed for each group separately. For example, the interviews with ex-CLBs explored their experience of the process, their own agency, competence and effectiveness and how the process was facilitated or obstructed by the actions and attitudes of their teachers. All of the teachers were interviewed by the third author and all of the ex-CLBs were interviewed by the first author. All the respondents' names are pseudonyms.

The interview data was subjected to a form of thematic analysis that utilised the research questions and theoretical approach as its basis. Procedurally, we followed the steps of the Framework Approach outlined by Pope et al. (2000). There was an ongoing iterative process in which successive stages of coding were informed by a regular review of the pre-determined research questions. The interviews were transcribed and coded separately and then crosschecked. Cross-case analysis then investigated patterns across the data, which were grouped together according to themes and related to the key research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## **Results**

### **Outcomes from the survey**

We present the outcomes of the survey for teachers and ex-CLBs together because the comparison of responses is of interest. The table indicates the proportion of respondents in each group who indicated that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with each statement that highlighted what were perceived as either advantages or disadvantages of child language brokering in school.

[Table 2 insert here]

We find it of interest that for some of the statements there is a broadly comparable level of agreement between the teachers and ex-CLBs. As mentioned previously, our sample of teachers could be viewed as somewhat biased, in that those who volunteered to be part of the study had an interest in second language learning in some capacity or were bilingual themselves. It is perhaps not surprising then, that there was a fairly equal pattern of opinions for certain responses. There was agreement about levels of understanding relating to language acquisition, language competence for technical words and cultural understanding. Both teachers and ex-CLBs were clear that language brokering could cost children some personal time.

However, some of the statements held greater weight for the ex-CLBs than for the teachers. When looking at the statements about “advantages” where there was a difference of 15% or more, these tended to highlight the perspective of the child or parent. For example, more of the ex-CLBs either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that parents would prefer using their own child over having a professional interpreter or a member of the school staff acting as translator. The ex-CLBs were also more likely to consider that advantages of children acting as LBs included that the parent’s own child understands what their parents already know and what they need extra explanation about. These findings support those from a study about access to professional interpreting services, which indicated that all of those sampled who had access to family or friends would use them in preference to either professional interpreters, bilingual staff or community provision (Alexander & Edwards, 2004). Issues of trust, not wanting others to know family business and accessibility were cited as the main reasons in that study. In a school context, accessibility is certainly

an issue, as many of the routine conversations that take place are not serious enough to require the expense of a professional interpreter. Equally, it may not be possible to have bilingual teachers or other staff that represent every language spoken in a given school.

The largest disparity between teachers and ex-CLBs, when looking at statements about “disadvantages,” referred to the child feeling it is inappropriate to say boastful things about themselves, so that they do not translate accurately when teachers praise them or describe their best achievements. This sentiment has been evidenced elsewhere by Garcia-Sanchez, Orellana & Hopkins (2011) who analysed the audio recordings of eleven parent-teacher conferences. They found that “downgrading teachers’ praise” was a dominant pattern of communication by the child language brokers.

Some academic authors and media commentators have expressed concern that the CLB role gives children too much power in relation to their parents leading to negative feelings (Chao, 2006). The survey responses indicated that other perceived disadvantages had greater salience for both teachers and ex-CLBs than this concern about “role reversal.” It is noticeable in Table 1 that only 44% of teachers and 46% of ex-CLBs expressed agreement or strong agreement with the proposition that acting as a translator “gives children too much power in relation to their parents”. These are much lower proportions than expressed concern about such issues as children having inadequate language skills or needing to deal with sensitive issues.

Thus, the survey analysis indicated that the teachers and ex-CLBs showed agreement on many of the supposed advantages and disadvantages of having children take on this role at school. Where they disagreed, the key factor appeared

to be the different experiences they had of the phenomenon with ex-CLBs prioritising family interests in their ratings. These trends in the data would need to be confirmed with a larger sample. However, we noted that the same broad patterns of opinion were found in the second phase of the study when interviews enabled us to explore the distinct perspectives of the two groups in more depth.

### **Responses from the interviews**

During the interviews, a question about the possible advantages and disadvantages of the CLB arrangements in their school stimulated extensive responses from both teachers and ex-CLBs. More participants contributed to the themes related to this question than to any other interview question. Some of their comments focused on the immediate advantages (such as cost savings and flexible timing) and disadvantages (such as a greater risk of translation errors). In this chapter we will examine what they had to say about the longer term impact of experiences of language brokering at school. We will present our analysis by focusing in succession on what respondents had to say about the impact of CLB activity in three key areas - language development, school life and identity and social development.

#### ***Impact on a child's language development***

It has long been asserted by some researchers and commentators that the practice of language brokering in childhood will have a positive impact on the acquisition of the language that is used (Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984). In our interview study, ex-CLBs discussed ways in which they felt that language brokering activities had, in their experience, led to improvements in learning English:

For advantages I think it would, it [language brokering] also helped me with my English because obviously, because obviously at that time I like, you know, *'oh I can't say it, like I know but I just can't say it'*, like it was, it was useful for me being a translator because it helped my English at the time. (Amita, ex-CLB)

A good thing, it improves yourself as well...It makes you, as you keep on talking, as you keep on translating your, like, thinking reaction gets quicker, it increases it. So that's, that's the good thing (Sameer, ex-CLB)

Some of ex-CLBs emphasised broader communication skills as well as linguistic knowledge:

I think there has never been a disadvantage, there was always advantage because I like talking to new people, I'm learning more words and stuff and I'm getting confident which is advantage... And also say like in talking with people so like eye contacts and stuff is getting better with me. And I'm not nervous. Like before if you come to me I would be like shaking and stuff but now I'm like more confident, I'm talking to you, I'm fine. Yeah (Anamika, ex-CLB)

And the advantages were that you get more confident so when you had to do presentations in class you'll feel more confident about it because you have spoken to other people and translated for other people. (Isabel, ex-CLB)

I think there are more advantages than disadvantages because it makes you look more mature and grown up and you take responsibility and you kind of learn professionally how to translate and I think your language improves a lot and you kind of learn a lot more about having proper professional conversations with grown-ups. (Kara, ex-CLB)



In addition, some ex-CLBs mentioned improving their home language as well as English as an advantage to being a language broker. Although there could be some negative consequences to taking time in the classroom to broker for another pupil, one advantage was an opportunity to practice the home language:

In year 8 there was a girl from Colombia who came to our country school for the first time and she was going to join the school permanently but she didn't speak a word of English so I had to, so I had to sit next to her in all her lessons to translate from Spanish to English and English to Spanish. And I personally felt I benefited from it because in a way I was practising my Spanish but in a way it was also quite, not hard but like it was hard for me to concentrate on my work and do hers at the same time. So it was a bit difficult but overall it was, it was fine. (Celia, .ex-CLB)

Celia weighed the time cost against the stimulus to her use of Spanish and judged the balance in the end to be "fine".

### ***Impact on school life***

When specifically asked to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of language brokering in school, both teachers and ex-CLBs highlighted the danger of drawing pupils away from their own studies to help another pupil, perhaps putting their own progress at risk. An ex-CLB who talked about this problem highlighted the tension created by having a sense of responsibility towards the pupil who was being helped:

I kind of like got hanged up, when, like, when I'm helping them, I couldn't take time for myself, so I sometimes get told off by my teacher as well, like "just do your work. They can do theirs." I was like "no, I have to help them because

they couldn't understand you," so, yeah, so I was like, I really don't care what I'm going to do, I'm just helping them first so, yeah. (Amita – ex-CLB)

When teachers discussed the potential disadvantages of using language brokers to help other children in class, they sometimes also expressed concern that the pupil used as a language broker would have extra homework or work to catch up on. But, one highlighted a potential problem for the other child in the situation who might develop too strong a feeling of dependency on their brokering friend or mentor:

We have had a case here only a couple of years ago where the, the friendship of one of the girls, she expected the other one to do all the work and she didn't speak at all and so, and when she did speak it would be in her own tongue to this other girl. And, it was putting a lot of pressure on the first student who was being the interpreter and the supporter, or the mentor, and she was feeling really, she was, it was getting her down, to put it bluntly. It was getting her down because she was getting very frustrated that the girl wouldn't talk to any of her friends, she wouldn't talk to anybody else except for her, she wouldn't do any work because all she'd do is copy this other girl's work (Alice, teacher)

Observing this, teachers set up a buddying system with a different set of pupils, so that the new pupil became friends with others and gained a greater sense of independence. This arrangement helped prevent the friendship going wrong and stimulated the new pupil to improve her command of English more rapidly than before.

The social dynamics of a school community operate in complex ways for those who accept a role that cuts across the usual networks. A child language broker is simultaneously acting for the adult authorities and acting for their own family or for

other pupils in the same age group. What they are asked to do will sometimes conflict with the expectations of others, creating a tension that is more difficult for them to understand and to resolve because those expectations are often unspoken. In Amita's case, she did understand what her teachers wanted but chose to defy them: "I'm just helping them first so, yeah." Sometimes, the conflict may be with peers rather than with teachers. One ex-CLB, Isabel, described a situation of that kind to the first author.

Isabel: The disadvantages were that sometimes you could lose your friends from the translating. It's kind of horrible especially when you know the child, and it's just, like, "oh, why me," and then your friends might get cross with you, but it's not your fault, like, I can't just be, like, "oh, yeah. She's doing great" when she's really not doing great, like you need your parents to push you to do your work so yeah.

Sarah: So, you're honest. You tell them.

Isabel: Yeah, and if my friends stop talking to me, well, that's life.

Sarah: Ok, has that happened?

Isabel: Yeah. But I can't do anything about it and I'm not going to lie to an adult. It's not right.

CLBs are thus set apart from their peers by taking on a semi-official role and, in Isabel's case, by taking it seriously. She went on to tell Sarah that, after losing her Spanish-speaking friends, she became close to a group that was mostly made up of pupils from England or the Philippines. Multilingual pupils are potentially members of more than one ethno-linguistic community in a school. In the next section, we will examine the broader impact of CLB activities on children's sense of identity and their social development.

### ***Impact on child's social development and identity***

Acting as a translator for others puts a person's language proficiency and social skills on display. They may feel exposed as a result and, if it proves to be a positive experience, their self-confidence may be enhanced. A number of teachers commented on this effect. Emma highlighted the impact of the fact that CLB activity is so visible:

I think it [language brokering] can be a really empowering experience. I think it can because, it's, it's showing that they've learnt stuff. It's showing that they can do stuff, and, and the parent may not understand it if they see it just written on a report. They don't understand, yes, I'm working, I'm working, I'm trying to learn English but look actually I've learned some and I've learned these words because now I can tell you those in my language, in our language, and I can explain to you stuff. So, I think it can be quite empowering. (Emma, teacher)

Alongside the external self-confidence a CLB is placed in a position that encourages the development of empathy and of a stance that facilitates effective social interaction:

Yeah, yeah, it's a handy skill. Well, I think, maybe, because I can put myself in that person's situation, that I have the patience to do it. I don't know if I, if I wasn't in that situation would I have the patience to do that sometimes because, I, I could see when, especially the girl from China, I remember seeing her in science class and people would be trying to talk to her and she don't, she didn't understand what they were saying, so they'll get fed up and lose patience and go. But, I think that if I wasn't in that situation I'd probably have lost

patience as well and leave, but, because I can imagine what she's going through I just stay and help her out. (Angelica, ex-CLB)

In contrast to these more positive perspectives was the possibility that a student would feel self-conscious and embarrassed in the role. This appeared to be more likely when language brokers were in a minority within their school or, in one case, was the only pupil from a particular country within that school.

I felt smart, gifted, and possibly embarrassed because it, like, the first two are really positive, but the last probably because it can be really embarrassing to sort of like have to translate and everyone's just like staring at you. And, as a child, you're sort of I think probably maybe more self-conscious so just kind of like "oh, my gosh, all these people are staring at me, it's like they've never heard another language before" so it did make me quite like embarrassed because it's like "oh my God," yeah... yeah... In a way, I felt sort of smart because my school, it was full of English people; so, for me to have all these languages, I felt, sort of, in a way you could say talented. But, it also did feel a bit weird because like all these other kids were like, "oh, my God, what's she saying?" (Celia, ex-CLB)

Some teachers noted that embarrassment would be particularly likely when the setting made the child feel exposed:

I have seen situations where I got the impression that the child was feeling a bit embarrassed, because, in some cases, sometimes the parents do understand. It's just the spoken English that might, that they might be, they might not be too confident to speak, but they do understand. And I think that sometimes the child thinks, "ok, everybody's looking at me," especially if it's not private, if it's when we have Parents' Evening and we're in a hall with other parents and

students and then they might think “ok, they’re looking at me” so they’re thinking that my parents don’t speak English, so that’s not good. So, I’ve seen that situation as well. (Kina, teacher)

When helping a new pupil from Nepal in the classroom, Sameer felt nervous not because of having to translate but:

Because everyone was like staring at you and like wanting to listen and I was like, “oh, please, don’t look at me!” (Sameer, ex-CLB)

For some CLBs, their obligation to translate for their parents was an embarrassing reminder of the differences between them and many of their peers. The research interview could have offered an opportunity to put this into perspective (cf. Toomey et al., 2013, p. 126):

It sounds like, now, more normal for me and it has refreshed my memory, how crazy I was when I was a child, and I kind of feel ashamed that I was actually embarrassed about my parents. (Kara, ex-CLB)

The underlying source of embarrassment in those situations was the tension inherent in developing a coherent sense of identity when pulled in different directions by conflicting cultural loyalties.

We get a situation sometimes where they’ve been here for 2 or 3 years and they don’t want to, they want to be English, they only want to speak English, they don’t want to speak their language. So, some students move away from their heritage and they want to, because they’re so assimilated with their new friends, their English friends, you know, their English clothes, their English customs, they only see the language spoken at home. Whereas, they associate that this is their life here, they don’t want to be, so sometimes they’re

not interested in, which I think is sad because it's such a skill to have the two natural languages so we have that problem sometimes... (Tom, Teacher)

The close alignment with English language and English culture may be a phase that a recently arrived adolescent migrant needs to work through in establishing a bicultural and bilingual identity, but there is strong evidence that an integrated bicultural or multicultural identity will be a more positive outcome in terms of their psychological health (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). This positive outcome is associated with effective and habitual cultural frame switching and a fluid, integrative identity (Toomey et al., 2013). The informants' narrative accounts of their experiences suggested that development towards those goals can be facilitated by successful performance as a CLB. When one was asked whether she felt that she was bridging two cultural worlds, she replied:

Yeah, in a, in a way, how do I want to say this. I don't know, I think like bringing two cultures, you know, you just feel good about yourself, you're bringing the new you and you want to, you know, participate in events here in the UK not only like bringing your culture, your home culture like your food and traditional thing, you can bring, you know, the UK culture as well, you know.

(Nathely, ex-CLB)

## **Conclusion**

In both parts of the study, our respondents made it clear that the context provided by a school can minimise the disadvantages of CLB activity and maximise its advantages. The reasons why adults (i.e., parents or teachers) arrange for children to act as language brokers are pragmatic, so as to make communication between others possible in the here-and-now. The short-term outcome and long-term impact will be more favourable if there is thoughtful staff support based on

underlying attitudes that are positive. Those who had acted as child language brokers in school reported that they had found the role easier when they sensed that the staff in their school perceived bilingualism as an asset and valued the role. Situations most associated with disadvantages tended to arise if there was no one in the school monitoring and supporting the ongoing language brokering activities of the pupils. The ultimate aim of this project was to provide an evidence base for stimulating good practice in the use of pupils as language brokers for their own parents and others in school. An internet-based guide, *Child Interpreting in School: Supporting Good Practice*, may now be found at <http://child-language-brokering.weebly.com>. The guide covers four broad areas: (i) Choosing the best person to act as a translator; (ii) Involving children and young people in a formal training scheme; (iii) Advice about children interpreting for parents and family members; and (iv) Advice about interpreters supporting peers in the classroom and around school.

All of this needs to be put into perspective. As other chapters in this volume show, child language brokering is required in many settings that offer less control and less support than is possible in schools. For the ex-CLBs in the study, the exclusive focus on school did not always make sense: their experience of the activity was not compartmentalised, and their account of its advantages and disadvantages necessarily encompassed all the settings in which it occurred.

## **Future Directions**

Future research on CLB activities in schools should aim to test the generalisation of the findings from this study to larger samples in more diverse settings. Those who agreed to participate in the study may have a deeper level of interest or a relatively more positive experience of CLB activity than those who did



not take part in the study. Research is required, as ever, to explore the perspectives of those who are disinclined to participate.

Young people's language brokering experiences differed in predictable ways between multilingual inner city schools and schools in some other parts of the country where there were few pupils who spoke English as an additional language. (Cf. work by Cline et al. (2002) on the experiences of minority ethnic pupils in "mainly white" schools.) There was also some evidence in this study of differences of perspective on language brokering activity between monolingual and bilingual teachers (see Cline et al., 2014, pp. 40-41). In each of these areas of potential differences, it will be valuable to follow up with more detailed and targeted research on differences in language brokering experience in diverse and less diverse school settings as well as the observations of monolingual and bilingual teacher-participants.

A particular gap in this, and other, UK research is the perspectives of parents on the use of their children as language brokers at school. One significant strand of concern within the literature was whether children acting as CLBs in school would choose to translate in ways that protected their own interests or would ally themselves with their parents as either a "performance team" or "parental advocate." In contrast to meetings at a doctor's surgery or a housing office, school represents a setting where the interests of child language brokers and their parents may not always be aligned. For example, Kaur and Mills (1993) reported on a child who tried to avoid trouble by making out that the school report presented by his teacher was better than it was. In a different situation, Hall and Sham (2007) described a child altering notes to the school written by her father because she did not want her teachers to know that she worked in the family's café each day after school. Thus,

the school setting may be a context where the family dynamics that are usually observed during child language brokering might be contested. Research to explore that issue would need to include parents, and this will clearly be a promising future direction for research.

A key factor in the dynamics of families' interactions with the outside world is that in most situations parents have a more sophisticated understanding of the context than their children. In our study focusing on school settings, ex-CLBs described situations where their parents had clearly lacked understanding about how particular aspects of the education system worked. The young person typically waited until he or she was home to provide in-depth explanations of this to their parents. Thus the "performance team" aspect of school brokering practice was not visible to those outside the family, and it was not cited as an advantage or a disadvantage by either CLBs or teachers. Research to investigate these processes will need to explore parents' perceptions of the dynamics of language brokering episodes in some depth, alongside those of their children.

### **Contribution to theory**

Our previous theorising of child language brokering has been set against a backdrop of critical theories of child development (e.g. Rogoff, 2003). Such perspectives contest that 'childhood' is necessarily bound up with assumptions about this phase of life being a time of play, formal schooling, and socialisation (Jans, 2004). Childhood historians showed that not only have our ideas of childhood changed over time (Cunningham, 2006), but there are also large variations in everyday practices within families today (Rogoff, 2003). The danger lies in making assumptions about what "childhood" looks like, which then becomes the template for a *normal* childhood. This assumption renders a range of aspects of childhood

*invisible* or *atypical* (Crafter et al. 2009). Sometimes, these tasks are characterised as a form of children's work (Hall & Sham, 2007; Crafter et al. 2009), Language brokering transgresses some of the characteristics of the *normal* or *ideal* childhood. For example, through the lens of developmental psychology (and a Western cultural context), childhood is represented by a move from dependency on adults to steadily increasing independence into early adulthood (Burman, 2009). The danger lies in assuming that the move towards independence is gradual for all children within such a society. In a globalizing world, CLBs often find themselves rapidly taking on roles and responsibilities following migration that might not be expected of an indigenous child.

In many ways, the institution of school might be seen as the central site managing that gradual move to independence as children are slowly granted access to increasing levels of knowledge and, to a lesser extent, autonomy. CLBs present school with a challenge because these children are asked to undertake tasks that sit outside the boundaries of "normal" school activities. We theorized, at the beginning of this project, that the discomfort felt by teachers towards CLB activity might come about because children are granted more power to affect the outcomes of interactions than is usual in teachers' dealings with parents. The picture that emerged from our informants is more complex, suggesting that perceptions and management of CLB vary between teachers and those with experience of the practice and (probably, though our data did not address this) between schools. There are implications for how the priorities of pastoral care in schools are evaluated (Cline et al., 2009) and for how schools ensure that their arrangements for CLB's facilitate both positive interactions with parents and positive outcomes in the long term for pupils acting as CLBs (Cline et al., 2014b).

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